The last report on the decline of melanism in *A. rumicis* in north-west Kent appeared during 2000 in this Journal; it illustrated a fall from 20% of ab. *salicis* in 1976 to an average of 6.1% for the five year period 1995-1999 inclusive. For the five year period 2000-2004 its incidence halved to 2.8%. This decline is summarised in Table 1.— B. K. WEST, 36 Briar Road, Dartford, Kent DA5 2HW.

Retreats for Peacock Butterflies *Inachis io* L. (Lep.: Nymphalidae) in changing weather conditions

On 28 April 2005, I observed two peacock butterflies fly directly and with masterly precision into one of two holes under a two-metre gorse bush, part of a rabbit run at the edge of a wooded clearing on Alderley Edge, Cheshire. The weather conditions were just in the process of changing from warmth and sunshine to being overcast with the beginning of rain, when the two butterflies, some five seconds apart, flew directly into the two openings, each some 20 cm up and across, neatly navigating the small space and overhang of gorse. The bush, on closer inspection, had a hollowed out centre and the butterflies had disappeared into the midst of it. I was particularly surprised by the occurrence of one specimen following another. The bush was very likely being used as shelter; perhaps they were familiar with the location as a roost. Another possibility is that the couple could have been a mating pair and the butterfly is known to choose secluded spots for mating (Baker, R. R.,1972. Territorial behaviour of the Nymphalid butterflies, *Aglais urticae* (L.) and *Inachis io* (L.). *J. Animal Ecology* **41:** 453-469). Whichever, this strongly suggests the value of shrubs as a resource for resting, roosting or shelter in *Inachis io*. — R. L. H. DENNIS, Remar, 4 Fairfax Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 6EY.

"Birching" for moths

On 18 March 2005, we were moth recording in the company of Mr Peter Franghiadi at Stover Country Park, Newton Abbot, Devon. It was a misty night and the temperature was 11°C. Away from the traps which had been set up SH noticed moths sitting on birch twigs. Further inspection revealed a number of species and many were seen with their proboscises presumably imbibing water from the birch twigs. There must have been a very thin layer of water on the twigs as in places drops had formed. It was however, from the twigs themselves not the visible drops that the moths were drinking. We were only able to inspect the lower branches and the growth around the base of the trees.

The commonest moth on the twigs was *Conistra vaccinii* – a total of 31, including a mating pair, was counted on five trees inspected. Other moths observed on the birch twigs were singles of *Orthosia munda*, *O. gothica*, *Eupsilia transversa*, *Ypsolopha ustella* and *Acleris notana* or *ferrugana*.

We did also look on other tree species, but the moths were few in comparison with the birch. On oak we saw one *O. gothica* resting and a mating pair of *C. vaccinii*. On sallow, one *O. cerasi* was noted.